

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method for setting a retrieval condition
when retrieving similar multimedia object data from
a multimedia object database on the basis of the
5 retrieval condition set by a user, the method
comprising:

displaying a retrieval condition setting area for
retrieval condition setting as an independent area; and
setting a retrieval condition on the basis of one
10 of multimedia object data which has been set in the
retrieval condition setting area and multimedia object
data which has been input to the retrieval condition
setting area.

2. The method according to claim 1, wherein the
15 multimedia object data which has been set in the
retrieval condition setting area comprises one of:
inquiry object data which has been set as a retrieval
condition; and one of an image and item associated with
inquiry object data.

20 3. The method according to claim 1, further
comprising:

displaying an object data list display area for
displaying images associated with respective data in
the multimedia object database, wherein

25 by selecting at least one multimedia object data
from the object data list display area, the selected
multimedia object data is displayed in the retrieval

condition setting area and a retrieval condition is set.

4. The method according to claim 3, wherein
in response to operation of a control button for
5 setting object data into the retrieval condition
setting area, disposed near one of an image and item
associated with original multimedia object data in the
object data list display area, the original multimedia
object data is displayed in the retrieval condition
10 setting area and a retrieval condition is set.

5. The method according to claim 3, wherein
in response to direct specification of one of an
image and item associated with original multimedia
object data in the object data list display area, the
15 original multimedia object data is displayed in the
retrieval condition setting area and a retrieval
condition is set.

6. The method according to claim 3, wherein
in response to operation of a pointing device to
20 specify one of an image and item associated with
original multimedia object data in the object data list
display area and move it onto the retrieval condition
setting area, the original multimedia object data is
displayed in the retrieval condition setting area and a
25 retrieval condition is set.

7. The method according to claim 2, wherein
the inquiry object data is set in the retrieval

condition setting area by one of:

inputting it via an external object data input unit connected to a retrieval apparatus to which the method according to claim 2 is applied;

5 selecting it from an external database; and
 taking in an object data file owned by the user.

8. The method according to claim 2, wherein
the inquiry object data is set in the retrieval
condition setting area by inputting multimedia object
10 specified by an Internet address specified by the user.

9. The method according to claim 1, wherein
the retrieval condition is set according to a
plurality of feature values calculated from a
multimedia object,

15 the retrieval condition setting area has a
plurality of feature setting areas, and
the feature setting areas are assigned feature
kinds which are set according to one of: the feature
values; and a combination of the feature values.

20 10. The method according to claim 9, wherein
the feature setting areas are arranged and
displayed in an n by m (where n and m are natural
numbers) matrix form in the retrieval condition setting
area.

25 11. The method according to claim 1, wherein
the retrieval condition setting area comprises a
dissimilar feature setting area for setting a

dissimilarity condition independently for each of selected objects.

12. The method according to claim 11, wherein
for each of feature values, similar and dissimilar
5 feature setting areas are provided as an adjacent pair,
and
a plurality of pairs are arranged in an n by m
(where n and m are natural numbers) matrix form.

13. The method according to claim 9, wherein
10 the retrieval condition is set according to a
combination of feature values which have been set in
respective feature setting areas provided in the
retrieval condition setting area, and

a method of the combination is set by the user.

14. The method according to claim 9, wherein
15 inquiry object data is set and disposed in an
arbitrary position in the retrieval condition setting
area, and

a weight of set feature values is set according to
20 a position in which the inquiry object data is set and
disposed.

15. The method according to claim 1, wherein
at the time of retrieval condition setting,
attribute information owned by a multimedia object is
25 set as a keyword in combination.

16. The method according to claim 1, wherein
a result of retrieval conducted by using the

retrieval condition which has been set is displayed in a list form in a retrieval result list display area, on the basis of one of: an order of similarity; and an order of a result of rearrangement when the user has
5 conducted a rearrangement operation on the retrieval result, and

a retrieval condition is set by one of: displaying as many high-ranking multimedia object data as a preset number in the retrieval condition setting area on the
10 basis of an order of display; and selecting at least one multimedia object data from the retrieval result list display area and displaying the at least one multimedia object data in the retrieval condition setting area.

15 17. The method according to claim 1, wherein the retrieval condition setting area is displayed in a display screen of a display device which is independent in hardware from an apparatus for executing actual retrieval.

20 18. An apparatus for setting a retrieval condition when retrieving similar multimedia object data from various multimedia object databases on the basis of the retrieval condition set by a user, the apparatus comprising:

25 a display device having a display screen in which a retrieval condition setting area for retrieval condition setting is displayed as an independent area;

an input unit configured to one of set and input multimedia object data in and to the retrieval condition setting area displayed on the display screen of the display device; and

5 a retrieval condition setting unit configured to set a retrieval condition on the basis of multimedia object data one of set in and input to the retrieval condition setting area by the input unit.

19. An apparatus for setting a retrieval condition
10 when retrieving similar multimedia object data from various multimedia object databases on the basis of the retrieval condition set by a user, the apparatus comprising:

15 a display device having a display screen in which a retrieval condition setting area for retrieval condition setting is displayed as an independent area;

 input means for one of setting and inputting multimedia object data in and to the retrieval condition setting area displayed on the display screen
20 of the display device; and

 retrieval condition setting means for setting a retrieval condition on the basis of multimedia object data one of set in and input to the retrieval condition setting area by the input means.